

Recycling: Myths vs. Facts

MYTH

Recycling in the United States is collapsing.

FACT

In thousands of communities nationwide, curbside recycling is collected on a regular basis. Every day, thousands of bales of paper, plastic, and metal are generated at recycling facilities and sent to domestic and foreign buyers. Only a limited number of communities have suspended curbside collection of recyclables or are sending them to landfills or waste-to-energy facilities.

MYTH

China has stopped accepting any recyclables or scrap from the United States.

FACT

Although China has imposed import bans on certain recycled paper and plastic, the U.S. continues to export a lot of recyclables and scrap to China. **In 2018, China imported more than 8 million tons of paper from the United States.**

MYTH

The contamination rate for recyclables in the United States is 25%.

FACT

Contamination rates vary widely by community. **According to data reviewed by SWANA, contamination rates typically range from 15-25%.** Contamination is a problem and local governments that have educated residents about how to recycle right have seen reductions in contamination rates

MYTH

Recycling isn't worth the effort anymore.

FACT

The market for materials may vary, but recycling always has major benefits. These include preserving landfill space, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, saving energy, reducing water use, protecting natural resources, creating new products and supporting tens of thousands of local jobs. Recycling is an essential public service that citizens expect and are willing to pay for.

MYTH

No one knows how to fix the challenges facing recycling.

FACT

Though it's not simple, solutions are being implemented. Public education and enforcement of local rules motivate people to recycle right. Recycling facilities are updating equipment and adding new technologies to keep up with changing material streams. New domestic facilities are opening and existing ones are expanding, providing more demand for recyclables.